



## What Makes Sherlock Holmes the Best of All Times?

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**ABSTRACT** *Detective fiction is a subset of fiction dealing with mystery and crime. Stories which hook the readers with its plot of mystery and suspense stay immortal. However it can be said that this genre is one of the most difficult ones to write; since the outcome might be ineffective if the style of writing is vague or too complex. Very few writers have achieved to stay successful in producing detective fiction. One such writer is Arthur Conan Doyle, one of the most famous and style-apart writer of the 19th century. Through his excellent writing Sherlock Holmes still stays an unmatched detective hero in the minds of readers.*

#### What Makes Sherlock Holmes the Best of All Times?

Story-telling is the oldest known source of inspiration and entertainment. People narrated stories to convey morals, instill fear of God and to sermonize on virtues. Par culture and tradition the practice of story-telling still stands atop other sources of entertainment. While oral narration has the best influence on listeners with the tone and expressions of the narrator boosting the whole act up, written narration cannot hold the attention of the readers as much. The choice of vocabulary and style of writing makes or mars the effect of the writer on the reader. One such writer who captured the attention of readers with his unmatched mystery fiction and still continues to do so is Arthur Conan Doyle.

Born of Scottish origin, A. C. Doyle set a new trend in detective writing with his collection of stories with the lead character Sherlock Holmes, who is still loved and revered by all mystery lovers. Doyle struggled to get his first work *A Study in Scarlet* published; and in 1886 when it eventually did, it was showered with positive reviews accumulating huge waves of fans. Doyle owed the creation of Holmes to his teacher Joseph Bell who inspired him build a man of observation, deduction and inference.<sup>[1]</sup> His sequel *The Sign of Four* received equal appreciation and laud as a result of which several short stories featuring Holmes was published in popular magazines of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These stories were later collected and compiled in five anthologies - *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*, *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, *His Last Bow* and *The Case-book of Sherlock Holmes*. Just when Doyle decided to end the life of Holmes with his last adventure "The Final Problem" where Holmes is supposedly defeated by his arch rival Professor Moriarty, continuous urge from critics and readers made him write *The Hound of Baskervilles* after which he continued with *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, *His Last Bow* and *The Case-book of Sherlock Holmes*. The characterization of Holmes urged people to go in search of 221B Baker Street, the supposed residence of Sherlock Holmes and his close associate, friend and biographer Dr. John Watson.

All the stories that revolve around Holmes are narrated by his close friend Dr. Watson who shares his quarters at 221B Baker Street. This makes the stories a first person narration – set from the view of Dr. Watson. Every description Watson makes – of Holmes, his moves, moods and deductions

– adds spice to the plot. Doyle uses formal English which sounds more like 17<sup>th</sup> century than 19<sup>th</sup>, flawless with its literary elegance.

Every story has a unique opening scene. This uniqueness triggers mystery right away in the minds of the readers. The choice of diction paves no way for boredom or lag and hence lays a smooth yet firm road for the plot to move on.

One of Conan Doyle's most apparent styles is the extensive use of adjectives to provide great detail for the reader. Within each of the novels, as different as they are, the reader can similarly expose themselves to the surroundings as they are portrayed, placing themselves in the milieu.<sup>[2]</sup>

Doyle's extensive use of imagery, metaphor and analogy further boosts the flow of the stories. The tone variations differentiating Watson and Holmes from the other characters, the vocabulary which are colourful and descriptive create magic.

Stories are meant to be told in past tense to create intense interest. Taking this into consideration, Doyle always makes Watson narrate the adventures recollecting from his past. Throughout the readers forget it as a piece of writing and rather feel as if they are listening to Watson narrating the stories orally. There lies the success of Doyle's style.

Yet another factor which makes the readers fall for is the contradictory characters of Holmes and Watson. The two unlikely individuals getting along to become great companions travelling from one adventure to another is an element of delight. Holmes – a man with Einstein-like brain, eccentric habits, passion for music, boxing, tobacco and science, addicted to drugs – in short what Dr. Watson calls "an automaton, a calculating machine".<sup>[3]</sup> Dr. Watson on the other hand is a person of perfection, always ready for an adventure, inquisitive gentleman who respects Holmes for what he is and what he is not.

The following are few notable lines from select works of Doyle. These lines feature a unique writing style which, it can be said, no other Victorian writer adopted. Wordplay at times when overused, wears down the readers. But, in Sherlock Holmes' adventures, Holmes' dialogues are most often filled with wordplay which Doyle fit at appropriate places thus using them to enhance the awe feel in readers.

"My name is Sherlock Holmes. It is my business to know what other people don't know." ('The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle' 323)

"You see, but you do not observe. The distinction is clear." ('A Scandal in Bohemia' 215)

"There is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact." ('The Bascombe Valley Mystery' 264) <sup>[4]</sup>

Doyle's attempts to create better characters were marred due to the strong influence of Holmes. Doyle himself in an instance expressed, "I think of slaying Holmes . . . and winding him up for good and all. He takes my mind from better things." <sup>[5]</sup> It was the pressure from die-hard fans of Holmes, which made Doyle revoke him after 'The Final Problem'. Centuries after Sherlock Holmes was created, the character still continues to capture the attention of readers worldwide. It is an undeniable fact that Doyle's inimitable writing style and expertise which makes Holmes an all-time favourite literary character.

**REFERENCE**

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